

Appropriations Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

*H.B. 6659: An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and
Making Appropriations Therefor*

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced, marginalized women and girls. For nearly fifty years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policies that advance the economic security of women across our state and promote gender equity.

CWEALF is testifying in regards to House Bill 6659: *An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025*, with respect to the budgets of the human services agencies, specifically for the Department of Social Services, which administers HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP).

Although we acknowledge that there are important priorities included in the Governor's Budget for human services agencies, it does not include sufficient funding to invest in our state's overall success. One critical element absent, for example, is the expansion of our state's HUSKY healthcare program up to age 26 for those who are income-eligible, regardless of immigration status.

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right and no one should be denied health care due to inability to pay or immigration status. In the last two years, Connecticut's state legislature has taken steps to expand access to HUSKY to children ages 0-12 years, because they know that ensuring access to healthcare is essential. Although these steps were made in the right direction, the gaps that have been created since then add overwhelming burdens for many families in the state.

CWEALF's Legal Education program serves over 1,000 clients per year, the majority of which are low-income women of color with one dependent. Some of the clients we serve are undocumented and come to us with questions about housing, workplace issues, their immigration status, and more. Since many of them are parents, some of our clients who are undocumented will be faced with the challenges of having their children grow out of the program and become uninsured again once they hit the age of thirteen. Others will have to deal with the reality of having only some of their children insured through the HUSKY program, and others uninsured due to their age.

Although we stand in support of expanding access to the HUSKY healthcare program to folks up to the age of 26, our long-term commitment is to continue fighting to ensure that all immigrants,

including parents and adults, have access to the healthcare they need, because healthy kids need healthy families. This in turn, would serve as an investment in the future of Connecticut and will substantially reduce healthcare costs for all members of our state.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the issues our clients face on a daily basis, and even though we are recovering from the pandemic, many families are still experiencing its long-lasting effects. If we want Connecticut to fully recover from COVID-19, we must work to center inclusive and equitable initiatives in how we move forward, especially when focusing on preventative measures to make sure we can keep our communities safe and healthy should the unimaginable happen again.

We urge the Committee to support the expansion of Connecticut's HUSKY healthcare program in the state budget to continue the conversation towards health insurance for all. No parent should be forced to choose between accessing the care their children need and paying their rent or putting food on the table. It is critical that we address the inequities of healthcare accessibility and its negative effects on all of its residents.